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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000457

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ON KARZAI'S ELECTION DATE
DECREE

REF: A. KABUL 455
[1](#)B. KABUL 372

Classified By: CDA Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Representatives of the international community agreed with the Charge in a 3/1 meeting to react calmly to President Karzai's election date decree, one day after the Karzai instructed the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to set an election date in accordance with the Constitution (ref A). The previously announced 8/20 election date received unanimous support at the meeting from officials representing 15 foreign missions and international organizations. Representatives told the Charge they believed the IEC and Afghanistan's political establishment would soon return to a consensus that acknowledged the impracticality or impossibility of a spring election. Representatives expressed more concern that Afghan leaders still needed to reach a consensus on presidential continuity and agree on steps to ensure full confidence in a free and transparent election. End Summary.

U.S. Position

[1](#)2. (C) On 3/1, the Charge met with representatives of 15 foreign missions and international organizations to discuss Karzai's 2/28 decree and to outline the U.S. position on the election date and post-5/22 presidential continuity. The U.S. supports the underlying principles articulated in Karzai's decree, but remains firmly committed to the 8/20 election date. August elections are the best means to ensure every Afghan citizen can express his or her political preference in a secure environment. Moreover, the U.S. believes a Karzai-led interim or caretaker government should lead the country between 5/22 and the inauguration of the next president in order to maintain the strongest central government possible to face the expected increase in Taliban attacks over the summer months. The U.S. also understands that Karzai and opposition leaders will have to agree on certain limitations on executive authority during the interim period in order to allay the opposition's concerns that Karzai would improperly use government resources to benefit his re-election campaign.

Reactions From Internationals

[1](#)3. (C) Foreign representatives were appreciative of the 3/1 U.S. public statement backing the 8/20 date and supported the Charge's efforts to encourage Afghan leaders to negotiate an agreement on presidential continuity that protects the legitimacy of the election and stability of the country. Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad called the U.S. statement "perfect." Canadian Charge Ben Rowsell expected his government to issue a similar statement later the same day. Representatives from France, NATO, China, and Japan also explicitly thanked the U.S. for releasing its statement and the French Charge said he expected a statement from Paris.

¶4. (C) All representatives agreed that we should not over-react to the significance of Karzai's announcement, noting that the decree did not specifically call for a spring election. Most representatives viewed the decree as a means for Karzai to demonstrate sufficient constitutional due process to the opposition before proceeding with an August or later election. EU Special Representative Ettore Sequi called Karzai's move "the beginning, not the end of a long process. We don't need to dramatize this process, we need to downplay it." UK Charge Andrew Patrick worried that overreactions would "perpetuate the idea that the country is on the edge of constitutional collapse, when we're nowhere near that."

¶5. (C) All agreed a spring election was logistically impossible. Scott Smith, special assistant to UNAMA SRSG Kai Eide, said any attempt to adhere to the Constitution with a spring election would violate the electoral law, with deadlines for candidate registration and vetting for an April election already missed. Smith expected the IEC would thoroughly outline the factors against a spring election in the next 7-10 days. IEC staffers have promised to wait until Eide returns to Afghanistan in order to consult with him before issuing a response to Karzai's decree.

Thoughts on the Way Forward

¶6. (C) Following Karzai's decree, representatives agreed the larger challenge remains the issue of post-5/22 presidential continuity and negotiations over the shape of an interim government. Russian Ambassador Zamir Kabulov admitted he had

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"more questions than answers" regarding the options various Afghan leaders have proposed to resolve the dilemma. He said Karzai would need to save face after this week's announcement and may need to "keep his options open" with regard to calling a Loya Jirga. German Ambassador Werner Hans Lauk reported that Karzai was confident he could restrict any Loya Jirga discussion to only the election date and presidential continuity.

¶7. (C) Sequi said Karzai preferred not to associate the word "caretaker" with any arrangement he may lead over the summer, as the concept recalled negative experiences in Afghanistan's recent history with caretaker governments. India's Prasad said he would counsel Afghans that in many countries governments resign and become caretaker governments by definition during election campaigns, including his own. He was optimistic Karzai and opposition leaders could eventually accept that a caretaker government of some kind during elections season could be an acceptable model for Afghanistan. The Charge encouraged attendees to keep pushing Afghans to resolve the issue in a manner that protected the 8/20 election date and preserved the country's stability. He requested twice during the conversation for the representatives to have their governments issues similar to the U.S. one. Representatives agreed to keep each other updated on their progress and to continue, as Kabulov said, to speak "with one voice -- the American voice" when appropriate (ref B).

Attendees

¶8. (SBU) Foreign officials present at the 3/1 meeting with the Charge were:

- Canadian Charge Ben Rowsell
- Chinese Charge Li Bijian
- Dutch Ambassador Hans Blankenberg
- EU Special Representative Ettore Sequi
- French Charge Jean-Francois Fitou
- German Ambassador Werner Hans Lauk
- Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad

- Italian Ambassador Claudio Glaentzer
- Japanese Political Counselor Masayuki Takashima
- NATO Senior Civilian Representative Fernando Gentilini
- Pakistani Charge Mansoor Ahmad Khan
- Russian Ambassador Zamir Kabulov
- Turkish Political Officer Murat Ugurluoglu
- UK Charge Andrew Patrick
- UNAMA Special Assistant to SRSG Scott Smith

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